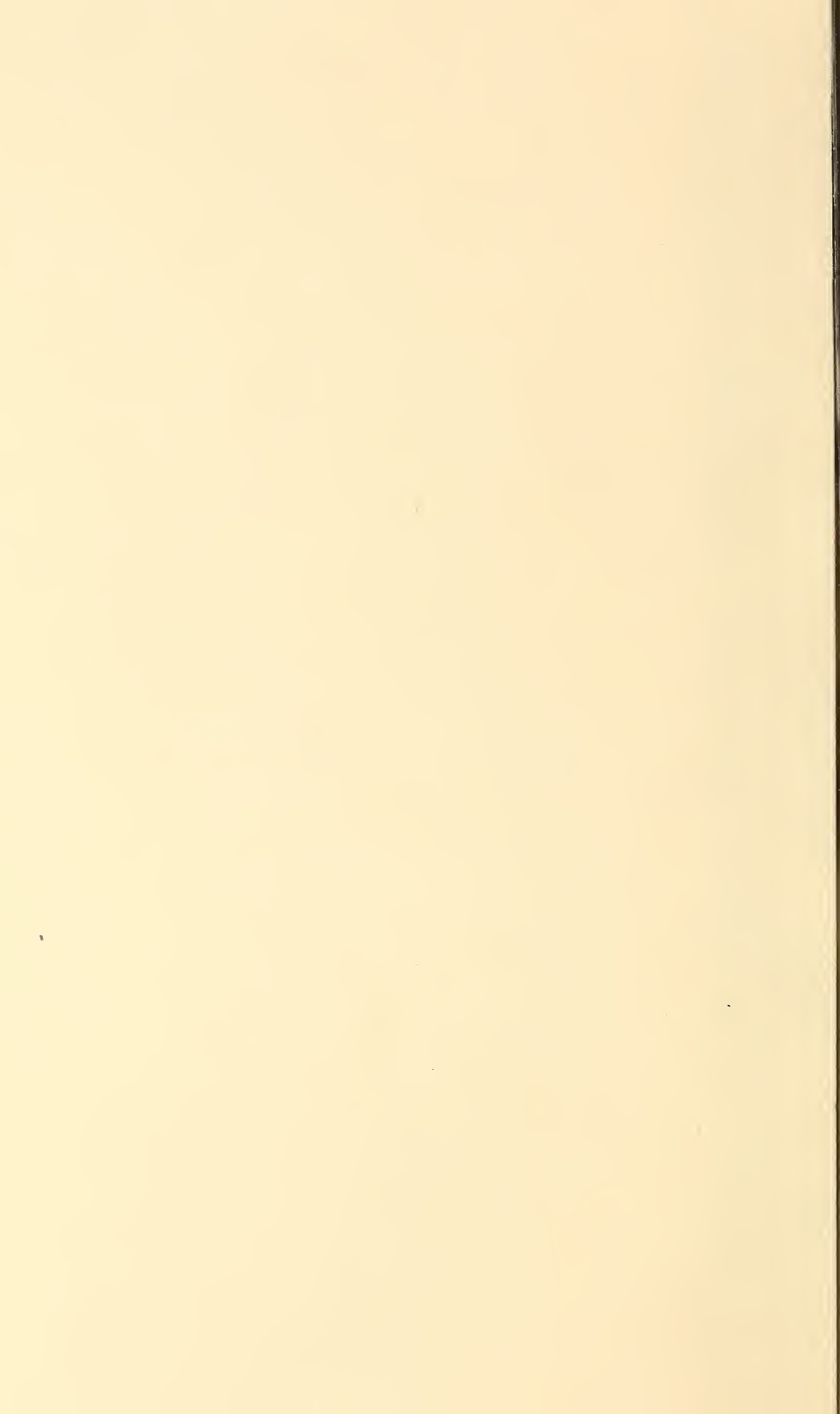


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# WHAT IS THE DISCUSSION LEADER'S JOB?



## OUTLINE

Why are farm people discussing public questions?

When is discussion most useful?

What gains come from discussion?

Individual gains.

Community gains.

What planning is desirable for discussion groups?

Formation of a group.

Size of group.

Meeting place.

Making people feel at ease.

Choice of subjects.

Assets in leadership.

What preparation does the leader need before the meeting?

Exploring the topic.

Analyzing the group.

Finding facts.

What procedures are helpful at the meeting?

Starting discussion.

Helping members contribute their best.

Making summaries.

Formulating future interests.

How can results be estimated?

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## WHAT IS THE DISCUSSION LEADER'S JOB?

To the minds of men and women who are selected to lead farm discussion groups there usually come a good many questions concerning the work. What are the values of the discussion method? To what kinds of meetings is it best adapted? To what kinds of topics? How much do leaders have to know about the subject to be discussed? What are some ways to get the discussion going? Once started, how can it be kept on the track? What sorts of summaries are desirable and when should they be made? How can interest be continued between meetings? These questions, and many more, occur to people who are getting their first experience in helping with discussion groups.

This pamphlet has been prepared as an aid to such leaders. It suggests some of the principles on which the procedures of successful discussion groups are based but does not attempt to lay down hard and fast rules. Because of the informality of the discussion method, groups vary one from another both in their needs and in the best ways of meeting their needs. Good leaders, by consequence, take carefully into account the particular situation of their groups when making use of procedures which have proved generally successful; they realize that the technique of group discussion is an experimental technique to which they can add their own discoveries from experience.

## WHY ARE FARM PEOPLE DISCUSSING PUBLIC QUESTIONS?

One answer to this question is that they always have—it's a habit. The tradition of discussion is an old tradition in the agricultural parts of the country, and one which has contributed much to sound decisions in the American democracy of the past.

The tradition has included informal discussion among neighbors—over the line fence, in the church yard, around the cracker barrel at the crossroads store. It has also included more formal meetings, called for the specific purpose of making public policy, of which the early town meeting was perhaps the outstanding example.

In the early years of American democracy, people who took part, either in casual confabs or in formal gatherings, had to have their own opinions, and to be able to back them up. The countless communities where such talk was going on had the benefit of the collective wisdom of their members on the problems that affected them.

For a while, when automobiles and hard roads were new and employment in city industry plentiful, this kind of discussion fell off because people were less aware of their local communities than they had been. There were fewer gatherings where the local community provided its own entertainment; people ranged around more and had fewer group contacts.

In recent years the tide has turned again. For a number of reasons, country communities have recovered a sense of their group life and a concern for its improvement. Because of the depression, fewer people have been leaving for the city; farm communities are solider. Also because of the depression, farm people have become convinced that many of the more important present-day problems of agriculture cannot be effectively solved by individual action on individual farms, but must be met through collective action of all concerned. At the same time, they have realized that before wise collective action can be taken, people must be informed; the problems at hand must be discussed in public until, out of the give-and-take of differing opinions, a general agreement appears, based on clearer understanding, and represents the will of the group.

### WHEN IS DISCUSSION MOST USEFUL?

Discussion is obviously only one of the available means of increasing general understanding of public issues. Lectures, demonstrations, debates are other possibilities,



each with appropriate uses. The lecture method affords an opportunity for the person lecturing to present material in clear and orderly form. Demonstrations are graphic because the processes being described occur before the eyes of the audience. Debates sharpen the pros and cons of an argument.

Discussion offers to members of the group opportunities to state a problem in their own terms and use their own resources toward a solution. It is inappropriate as a method of fact-finding—the techniques of scientific research are far better adapted to that purpose. Discussion is similarly unsuited to conditions in which immediate executive decisions have to be made—the emergency may be too great for discussion. The discussion method is primarily desirable as a means of solving problems about which some information is already available and on which executive action is still in the future, but concerning which active interest and divergent views exist in the community. Under such circumstances discussion provides members of the community with a means of comparing opposing attitudes and beliefs, bringing science and experience into relation, discriminating between facts, opinions, prejudices, and developing for themselves a body of well-tested opinion as a basis for future action.

The common use of discussion in directors' meetings of farm and civic organizations and agricultural planning

committees is an indication of its usefulness to small groups with regular meetings whose decisions need to represent the will of the whole board. Its increasing success with somewhat larger groups of people who wish to discuss problems of general importance shows the desirability of including, among the various methods of treating public issues, one which allows the citizens themselves to take an active part. Then each feels more personal responsibility for the success or failure of the policies adopted.

## WHAT GAINS COME FROM DISCUSSION?

Gains from the use of discussion may be assessed from the standpoint of the participating individuals, and also from the standpoint of the communities in which active discussion is going on.

### INDIVIDUAL GAINS

People appreciate a chance to express themselves on public questions. Young people, particularly those who have enjoyed taking part in high-school debates or oratorical contests, take pleasure in continuing their school interests in their out-of-school life. Older people like to tie their practical experience up with wider issues and policies. Both groups like to shake off the inertia of being only readers, only spectators, only listeners, who day after day get newspapers, lectures, speeches, and radio programs with never an occasion for giving their views on the opinions expressed.

In addition to a desire to join in the give-and-take of forming opinion, a good many people relish the discussion process because it disciplines both their thinking and their social behavior. Gaining skill in analyzing the main features of a point of view, and presenting them clearly, attractively, and briefly; learning to listen to and think through divergent views and cooperating in finding common ground between them; the excitement of finding new facts following an opening up of issues, all give a sense of personal growth which participants appreciate keenly.



Individuals who are practiced in the process of group discussion know what they believe and can say why in public. They can intelligently question statements of doubtful origin and aid in bringing out facts.

### COMMUNITY GAINS

The sense of achievement enjoyed by members of vigorous discussion groups is likewise a major asset from the standpoint of the community. General public exercise of the process of policy formation is necessary to democratic government. Where public issues are the subject of lively discussion, people are citizens in fact as well as in name. The give-and-take helps them put on mental muscle, and develops both leaders and the type of intelligent follower who gives representative government something to represent. Unless the interests of the people are locally made known, and unless policies for furthering those interests are locally worked out, the action of economic events will force the making of policy by the central government. Where local provision is made for the development of policy, problems are foreseen and examined before they reach the stage of being crises, before it is necessary to plunge into action without much previous exploration of the problem and without previous achievement of agreement by the people. This is working democracy.

### WHAT PLANNING IS DESIRABLE FOR DISCUSSION GROUPS?

Careful thought therefore needs to be given to the amount and type of organization which will keep discussion of public issues from running out in aimless talk, while at the same time conserving the sense of equality and the informality of spontaneous democracy.

### FORMATION OF A GROUP

The method of organizing discussion groups obviously varies a good bit from community to community.

Some places are already so thoroughly organized that it would be a mistake to form new groups for discussion.

In such places, discussion of agricultural and national issues may fit admirably into the plans of an **existing organization**. In a number of States farm organizations such as the Grange, the Farm Bureau, the Farmers' Union, and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union are using the discussion method to treat questions which are already on their programs. So are members of cooperative organizations. So are church study groups. So are P.-T. A.'s and civic clubs.

On the other hand, there are areas where few agencies are operating and where **new organization** is desirable. People organizing new groups do well to recognize the importance of including a cross section of the community. Variation in views is essential to purposeful discussion.

In highly organized areas, **combined meetings** which draw on the membership of several organizations may assure a hearing to the various interests in the community and prevent discussion from slowing down because everybody thinks alike.

Well-planned discussion groups are likely to have certain features in common, no matter for what purpose their organization may have been undertaken. Active groups are likely to be small enough so that those present do not divide into spectators and participants, with those up front doing the talking and those around the edges either sitting passively or carrying on their own conversations in an undertone. Successful groups are likely to meet in a place where people can be comfortable and where everyone feels equally free to go. Vigorous discussion is likely to take place if the subjects selected are those in which people of divergent views start with a lively interest. Members are likely to make their best contribution if leadership of the group is tactful, impartial, and stimulating.

#### SIZE OF GROUP

Groups of 15-30 people usually contain enough variety of experience and opinion to bring out most important points for discussion of a given topic; they are also small enough to keep the members from dividing into partici-



pants and spectators. Larger groups lay a progressively heavier tax on the leader to prevent such a division, and on members to make themselves heard without raising their voices.

Where groups are unavoidably large, the panel method may be substituted for informal discussion. Where the panel method is used, a selected number of people discuss the topic, in full view of the others; after a period the chairman may open the meeting to the whole group.

A still more formal method for large groups is the forum, with presentation of the subject by one or more speakers followed by questions and discussion from the floor.

Communities vary as to the place where representatives of the various groups of citizens feel free to come. It may be a community center, a courthouse, a school, or a church—one group is on record as meeting in an empty freight car. The important question to ask in selecting the place is—will all those expecting to take part feel at ease there?

#### MAKING PEOPLE FEEL AT EASE

Once the place is selected, there are other factors in making members feel at ease. If people are too hot, their minds become stuffy, and the least interested are likely to go quietly—or not so quietly—to sleep. Members who are wondering if they are catching cold from the draft on the back of their necks are likely to lose the thread of the argument. Hard straight chairs make people shift in their seats even if the topic discussed is interesting them.

So do strong lights in the direct line of vision. And nobody is going to make a very spirited contribution to the discussion if he has to address it to the back of somebody else's neck. Seating is very important; discussion groups and their leaders do well to remember that the cracker-barrel was round, and that if they wish to see all sides of a subject, it is not a bad idea to sit in a circle and put the problem out in the middle where everybody can look at it from his particular angle. Five or ten minutes' attention given before the meeting to making people physically comfortable, may go far toward making them mentally and socially at ease once the meeting is started.

### CHOICE OF SUBJECTS

**Existing interests** of group members are of first importance when topics for discussion are being selected. Everyone has been at meetings in which the group's spirit flagged because the subject was one for which those present had little or no previous concern, which did not strike them as presenting a problem, or which seemed remote from matters about which they had some first-hand knowledge. Under such circumstances, whatever is learned is likely to be only vaguely related to the part of the group's thinking on which decisions are based, and little or nothing will be done about a solution. Lively interest, on the other hand, is apt to be displayed when the questions discussed are timely questions about which the group feels keenly. Then members are all set to explore the subject, to seek new facts on it and work them into the body of knowledge they already possess, to analyze what makes their situation a problem, and to figure out how the problem can best be solved. They feel a drive to carry through the job, and a sense of responsibility for the outcome of their deliberations. This spirit is most likely to appear in groups where the subject is treated so that discussion may lead from points which members know a good bit about to related points where they have something to discover. That usually means beginning pretty close

to home, but it doesn't mean staying in a rut. If groups come at big subjects, whether local or national, from familiar points of departure, they have a chance to relate new to old experience, to get the greatest usefulness from facts they already know and situations they already understand, and to put new discoveries on a map where a certain number of landmarks are already charted.

The wording of topics is important to such an approach. The question form is often desirable, particularly if the question is so phrased that it cannot be quickly disposed of by a "Yes" or "No" answer, or a list. Thus if a question on farm credit were phrased: "Is our current system of farm credit adequate?" discussion might drag if the group were agreed on a "Yes" or "No" answer; and if the group were divided, the discussion might degenerate into an exchange of "'Tis" versus "'Tain't." If the question were phrased, "What are the farmers' credit needs?", discussion might be lively while a list was made of credit to buy machinery, credit to buy feed and fertilizer, credit to buy appliances for the home, and so on. But the question might not lead on from the list to analysis of the problem and a search for solutions. If some such phrasing as "What would be an adequate system of farm credit?" were used, however, an examination of existing facts would be likely to be followed by suggested solutions of difficulties felt by the members.

### ASSETS IN LEADERSHIP

Cracker-barrel discussions didn't have leaders. Town meetings were sometimes too formally led. It is therefore highly desirable for leaders of today's discussion groups—as well as for the members who choose someone to take charge—to keep in mind the purposes for which a leader is wanted.

The important thing about a discussion is obviously not the leader but the subject that is out in the center of the circle formed by the group. The reason for having a leader is to help the group in its examination of the subject. He keeps the discussion going, but does so unobtrusively.



A discussion group leader's function is to encourage the expression of ideas all around the circle of which he is a part, to see that relevant facts are available when needed, to ask questions and make occasional summaries without letting his own views intrude, to get rough stretches smoothed out without using a steam roller.

The development of agricultural policy has two equally important but distinct phases. One is the formation of opinion on public issues. The other is putting that opinion into effect. The outstanding characteristic of successful farm leadership in the second phase is a capacity for vigorous executive action to put through policy which has been decided on. The outstanding characteristic of successful farm leadership in the first phase is a capacity for drawing out the best that is in the community as to what policy shall be. Farm men and women have opportunities to exhibit the policy-executing type of leadership in connection with the action programs of farm organizations, cooperatives, Government agencies, and the like. They have opportunities to exhibit the policy-forming type of leadership in connection with the deliberations of discussion groups. People with particular aptitude for stimulating the process of policy forming are specially qualified for discussion group leadership.

## WHAT PREPARATION DOES THE LEADER NEED BEFORE THE MEETING?

The preceding paragraphs have suggested some of the general objectives at which discussion leaders might well aim. What, however, are specific steps which they might take to reach those objectives?

### EXPLORING THE TOPIC

Most leaders feel well repaid for time spent before the meeting in exploring the question to be discussed. They find it useful to list the main points which have a bearing on the subject, and write down enough questions on each to draw people out. The questions are likely to fall into three groups:

(1) Questions of analysis, so that the group may be clear in its own mind as to just what it is starting to discuss;

(2) Questions which bring out reasons why the topic under discussion represents a problem;

(3) Questions which stimulate people to suggest various solutions to the problem. For example, in one State, the following suggestions were worked out for use with the topic: "How do farm people live in comparison with city people?"

#### a. Opening Questions:

1. What are the advantages of country life in comparison with city life?
2. Would you rather live in the country or in the city? Why?

#### Factors to Consider

Educational.	Food and clothing.	Transportation.
Financial.	Housing.	Social.
Health and medical care.	Contentment, security.	Employment.
Recreational.	Religious.	Young people.

#### b. Questions to Bring Out Information:

1. Do farm people or city people have the greater income? Explain.
2. Does farm or city offer greater security during depression? Explain.
3. How does unemployment in the city affect farm income?

4. How do farm housing conditions compare with those in the city?
5. How do country and city educational advantages compare?
6. How does leisure of country people compare with that of city people?

**c. Questions to Ask in Solution:**

1. What can be done to keep the young people on the farm?
2. What can we do to increase farm income?
3. What can the Government do to increase farm income?
4. How may country and city cooperate for the benefit of both?

It should be noted that these are all questions prepared with a view to giving the group a start on its own line of interest, in no sense prepared as a hard and fast program to be followed regardless of the group's desires.

### ANALYZING THE GROUP

At the same time that the leader explores the topic to be discussed, it is important for him to think in concrete terms of the group for whose use the questions are intended. If it is true that people show greatest interest and learn most readily in relation to situations which they already feel as problems, where is the group psychologically most ready to pick the subject up? If it is true that new experience means most if definitely related to previous experience, where are the points of contact between the subject of the evening and aspects of the same problem with which the group is already familiar? If it is true that abstract principles have most significance when they are seen to be made up from concrete cases, what are the best examples, known to all who will be present, of the wider implications of the topic to be discussed? Leaders who think in specific terms of the group members likely to be present will be helped in the framing of questions suitable to stimulate discussion once the meeting is begun. Especially in newly formed groups, the leader should make clear the part which members are to play. People who have been accustomed to sitting as listeners at lectures or other public meetings where they were not expected to say anything, often feel a certain strangeness at the first meeting where they themselves are the source of the program.



A statement from the leader, inviting everyone to take part and explaining that expression of a variety of views is desirable rather than otherwise, is often of great help.

### FINDING FACTS

As part of their preparation before the meeting, leaders will obviously wish to go over the main facts on the subject at hand. More than that, they will wish to make plans so that information may be available to group members, both before and during the meeting. There are several ways of doing this: (1) Putting members in touch with printed materials, pamphlets, radio programs, and the like and (2) arranging for specially informed people to be in the group.

**Radio programs** may bring out new viewpoints and additional information on subjects to be discussed. A number of broadcasts of forums and discussion groups operate on a regular schedule over national hookups throughout the winter, with speakers giving pros and cons on topics of the day, often followed by questions from the floor. The accompanying illustration shows a group of farm men and women, all active members of discussion groups, broadcasting a discussion of the topic: "For What Purposes Should Farmers Organize?" over the National

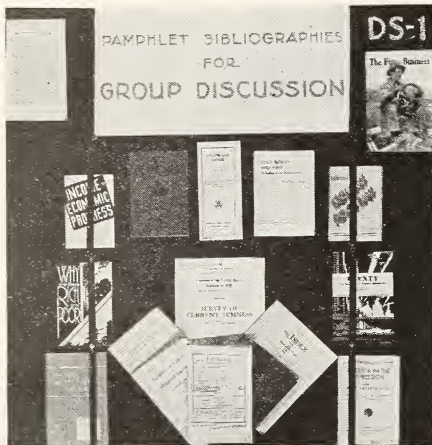


Farm and Home Hour. A number of State extension services arrange similar broadcasts over their State stations.

Printed materials are available from a variety of sources. The extension services of most States have designated a staff member to serve as State discussion leader. Through such leaders materials prepared by the State may be obtained on the subject under discussion, and also materials prepared by other governmental agencies such as the United States Department of Agriculture, and bibliographies on the publications of private agencies.

The United States Department of Agriculture has a series of short, popularly written pamphlets prepared especially for

use by discussion groups—a list of their topics is printed on the back cover of this publication. These pamphlets contain reading lists of other material—inexpensive or free—on the same subjects. Some of the references listed give the background of factual material necessary to a thoroughgoing discussion of the various topics. Others give points of view as to what



should be done in the light of existing facts. Many of these points of view are contradictory; it is left to the reader of the list to make up his mind which is most nearly right. To save leaders' time in ordering these reference materials from many different agencies, arrangements have been made with the Pamphlet Distribution Service of the Public Affairs Committee, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York City, to handle orders for items on these lists provided five or more copies of each are wanted. The Pamphlet Distribution Service will also place orders for pamphlets listed in the very complete bibliography "Public Affairs Pamphlets" issued by the United States Office of Education and obtainable

at \$0.10 by writing to the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.

**Libraries** offer another resource to leaders in search of materials. If leaders get in touch with county librarians in advance of the meeting and inform them of the subject to be discussed, they will cooperate in looking up references, making excerpts from technical materials, assembling collections of pamphlets and newspaper clippings to which leaders can then refer members of their groups. Where county library facilities are limited, contact with State librarians helps to provide information on book packet services, traveling library trucks, and other means of bringing charts, books, and pamphlets within reach.

**Specially informed people** from extension staffs, colleges and universities, cooperative organizations, county officials, and others may be very helpful in bringing needed information to the group. Specialists who weave their facts into the fabric of the group's thought by response to questions, or by suggestions of relationships between new material and material which is already familiar, carry the process of group thinking forward. The leader should be careful, however, that the information supplied is information for which the group has already felt a need. Specialists who lecture, or offer information about matters in which the group has not yet developed an interest, contribute much less to the group's progress. It is up to the leader who brings in outsiders as sources of information to choose people with a capacity for meeting and staying with the group on its own ground, and for remaining in the background except when they are requested to give aid.

In their search for specially informed people, leaders should look inside as well as outside the group. There may be among the members several who are particularly well up on some phase of the subject to be discussed; there are almost certain to be members who are willing to spend some time in special preparation if the leader puts them in touch with bibliographies or actual materials, or suggests that they do some thinking in advance on one or two specific questions. Here again the leader has a chance

to apply one of the principles of how people learn; members who seek out information for themselves and organize it for presentation to the group are apt to get much more out of it than if facts collected by somebody else are simply handed out to them at the meeting.

## WHAT PROCEDURES ARE HELPFUL AT THE MEETING?

To discussion leaders with limited experience the first few minutes of the meeting are apt to be the hardest. Will there be a stony silence, or will people discuss?

### STARTING DISCUSSION

Several ways of breaking the ice have proved successful in discussion groups. Sometimes the leader makes a very brief introductory statement of what the problem is. Sometimes he asks a member of the group with whom he has previously talked to go on with what he was saying on the subject. Sometimes he begins with one of his prepared questions. Sometimes he throws out three or four of the questions—or writes them on a blackboard—asks the members which one they think supplies the best handle for taking hold of the subject and a discussion of relative merits starts the meeting off briskly.

Quite often, of course, especially where the subject is well worded and selected in line with the group's interests, comment may be so lively that it is unnecessary for the leader to use any questions. In such cases, the starting problem disappears as soon as the group has gathered. Sometimes the group may start informal discussion as the members gather, including each new arrival as he comes.

The extent to which a group is of the self-starting variety can be tested by charting the course of the discussion. If things are moving slowly the conversational ball is apt to pass back and forth from the leader to a member of the group and back to the leader again. (See chart A.)

If, on the other hand, things are going well and the members are eager to take part, the ball is apt to pass around from one member to another, coming back to the leader only occasionally. (See chart B.)

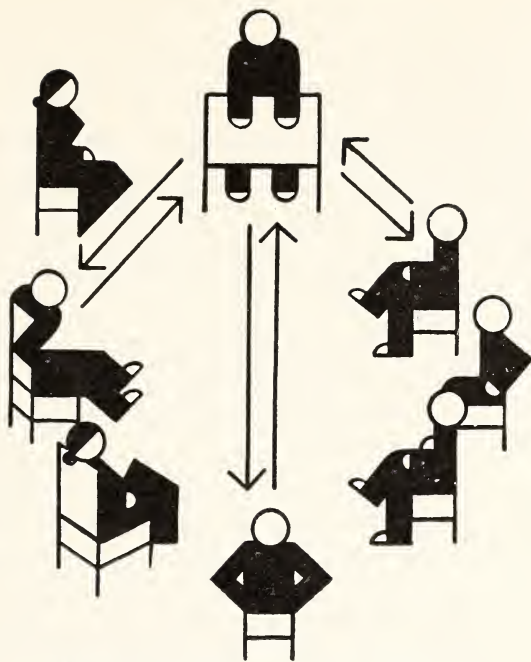


Chart A.—Discussion Going Badly.

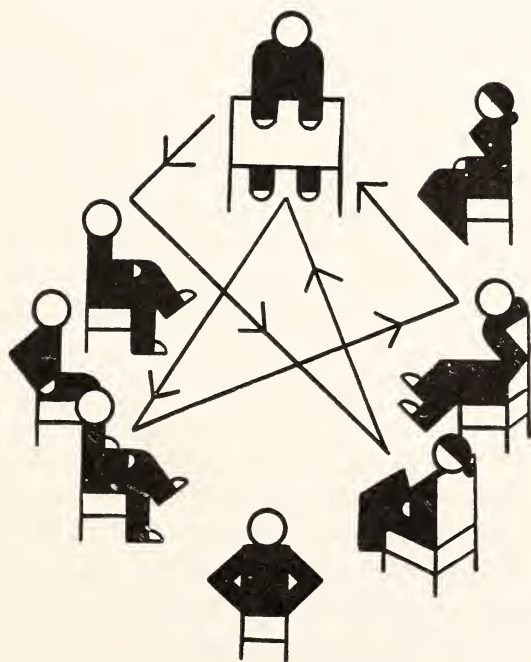


Chart B.—Discussion Going Well.

In the second case, the function of the leader shifts from trying to draw people out to trying to balance the discussion and help participants contribute their best.

### HELPING MEMBERS CONTRIBUTE THEIR BEST

The average leader will find that he usually has in his group somebody who is either so bursting with enthusiasm or so insensitive to the other people present that he (or she) wants to do all the talking.

The presence of people who are hard to interrupt increases the likelihood that there will be others in the group who are slow to participate or feel incapable of bearing their share of the discussion.

Then there are people who fix upon a single instance which may be far from typical of the general case under discussion, and seek to make it the center of all that is said.

Others concentrate on the short-run or local merits and demerits of a topic, and can only with difficulty be pried loose to look at the thing as a long-term proposition, or one applicable to a wide area.

Still others have one simple solution which they bring forth for any and all problems, often something they have heard, been taught or read in books and which they are reluctant to examine or to have examined.

Every leader of any experience can add further types to this list. And every leader realizes that a good part of his usefulness to the group lies in his capacity to aid its members to correct these tendencies, many of which are due to lack of practice in public discussion.

Can he help the too-ready talker to halt and get interested in what other people are thinking by suggesting at the opening of the meeting that comments be limited to a certain number of minutes, or that no one shall speak a second time until all who wish to take part have been heard? Can he draw out reticent members by first asking them questions that require only short, yes-or-no answers, and then inviting their aid through some such device as referring to a previous conversation with them or asking

them to report on something they have read—why not ask reticent members beforehand to be prepared to discuss a phase of the subject? Can he divert the person whose mind is fixed on a single illustration by asking for other experience, or inquiring what the group regards as typical or average cases? Can he aid the person whose mind is focused at short range to lengthen his perspective by starting with an instance close to home and then gradually moving on to more general applications of the principle under discussion? Can he get the person with the cure-all to examine the limits of its usefulness by applying it to concrete cases? Best of all, can he help create the kind of atmosphere in which the members of the group will do these things for each other?

### **MAKING SUMMARIES**

Especially when the discussion is going well and contributions are coming in from all sides, the leader can aid the group considerably by making summaries from time to time which help members to take stock of where they are. These breathing spells allow loose ends to be gathered up and sorted out before the argument proceeds further. Care should be taken that such summaries are confined to clear, brief statements of what has already been said, without the injection of new ideas by the leader. Sometimes the leader may ask the members to do this summing up. Summary by the group is particularly desirable at the end of the discussion, so that progress may be assessed. This may offer a good means of getting reticent people to take part. Quiet people often think and summarize clearly.

### **FORMULATING FUTURE INTERESTS**

The making of the closing summary allows the leader an opportunity to call the group's attention to possible topics for future meetings. Particularly where the subject just discussed has been a broad one, assessment of the point so far reached frequently makes it apparent that only one aspect has been covered. In that case the group

may wish to continue the same subject for the next meeting or for the next several meetings, and work out with the leader appropriate subdivisions to be successively taken up. For instance, a general topic like "The state and the farmer" might be broken down into "Why have a government?"; "What changes are desirable in local and national government structure?"; "What should be the relationship of government to agriculture?"

On the other hand, if the group is inclined to feel that it wants to move on to a new subject, the summary may offer the leader opportunity to suggest possibilities which have grown out of the discussion just ended. Discussion of soil conservation may lead naturally into discussion of tenancy or of farm income; discussion of taxation may lead naturally into discussion of the functions of government. By pointing out potential subjects embedded in the group's current interests the leader can offer notable guide service.

The summary period also affords the leader an opportunity to call the attention of members to available materials for further reference. The opening up of issues during the discussion often increases the demand for reading materials, and provision should be made for making them available.

### HOW CAN RESULTS BE ESTIMATED?

After the lights are turned out and the door locked on the meeting, how can the leader assess what has happened?

If the meeting has gone badly there are a number of questions he might ask himself, and discover a clue as to the trouble.

Was the fault

**The topic:** Not clearly stated; not vital to the group; beyond the group's experience?

**The leader:** Talked too much; allowed one or two members to talk too much; expected a set answer; failed to aid the group to move on?

**The members:** Too nearly in agreement; reticent, noncooperative, uninterested; resented monopoly of the discussion by one or two members?



**The group:** Too large; uncomfortable because of physical surroundings; tired by too long a meeting?

**If the meeting has gone well** the discussion leader has fewer worries. There are, however, a number of questions which he might ask himself which are important to the future of group discussion:

How can the leader and the group show enough foresight in the selection of topics so that the community in which the group meets will have the benefit of previous discussion of national issues affecting agriculture before the issues become critical?

How can the group be made adequately representative of the various elements and interests in the community where it meets?

When the group attains constructive agreement on a subject how can that agreement become an active force in contemporary policy?

## DISCUSSION PAMPHLETS

This publication has been prepared to assist leaders of discussion groups in rural areas. Attention has been centered chiefly on the informal method suitable for use with small groups, as contrasted with forums and panels on the one hand and lectures on the other, all of which rely relatively more on contributions by one or a few individuals than on participation by the group as a whole.

In addition to this bulletin on the technique of group discussion, the Department of Agriculture has prepared, and will distribute free upon request addressed to the Extension Service, a series of other publications especially arranged for use by discussion groups. The bulletins whose titles are listed below, contain both factual material and expressions of divergent views current in the country on the topic under consideration.

### SUBJECT-MATTER PAMPHLETS FOR THE 1936-37 SEASON

- DS-1 What Should Be the Farmers' Share in the National Income?
- DS-2 How Do Farm People Live in Comparison with City People?
- DS-3 Should Farm Ownership Be a Goal of Agricultural Policy?
- DS-4 Exports and Imports—How Do They Affect the Farmer?
- DS-5 Is Increased Efficiency in Farming Always a Good Thing?
- DS-6 What Should Farmers Aim to Accomplish Through Organization?
- DS-7 What Kind of Agricultural Policy Is Necessary to Save Our Soil?
- DS-8 What Part Should Farmers in Your County Take in Making National Agricultural Policy?

### SUBJECT-MATTER PAMPHLETS FOR THE 1937-38 SEASON

- DS-9 Taxes: Who Pays, What For?
- DS-10 Rural Communities: What Do They Need Most?
- DS-11 Soil Conservation: Who Gains By It?
- DS-12 Co-ops: How Far Can They Go?
- DS-13 Farm Finance: What Is a Sound System?
- DS-14 Crop Insurance: Is It Practical?
- DS-15 Reciprocal Trade Agreements: Hurting or Helping the Country?
- DS-16 Farm Security: How Can Tenants Find It?

### TECHNIQUE PAMPHLETS

- D-3 What Is the Discussion Leader's Job?

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United States Department of Agriculture

The Extension Service and the  
Agricultural Adjustment Administration Cooperating

(Photographs by the Farm Security Administration and the Extension Services of  
South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Iowa)

October 1937